Written Discourse and the Recognition of Personality: Visual Self-Presentation, Manipulation, and the Epistemology of Slow Reading

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Abstract

This article proposes to consider written discourse not as a form of self-expression, but as an epistemological instrument for the recognition of personality within digital culture. In contrast to visual forms of self-presentation (photography, video) and manipulative journalistic texts, writing fixes a prolonged trajectory of thought and minimizes the possibilities of simulation. Particular attention is given to the role of error, logical sequence, repetition, and return as diagnostic indicators of autonomous thinking. The analysis draws on classical observations concerning mass influence and slow reading, as well as on historical examples of diaries, correspondence, and non-addressed written traces as forms that enable the recognition of personality outside the regime of public presence.

1. The Problem of Recognition in Conditions of Visual Abundance

Digital culture creates the impression of unprecedented accessibility of the subject. Photographs, video recordings, oral statements, and short textual reactions form a dense field of presence in which the individual appears fully observable. However, this observability primarily concerns behavior, affect, and self-presentation rather than the structure of thought.

As a result, visibility is increasingly confused with recognizability. The subject is constantly present, yet epistemologically opaque. In this context, a

methodological question arises: which forms of communication allow us to recognize not the subject's intention or declared position, but the stability of cognition, logical coherence, and the limits of their thinking?

2. Visual Formats and the Limits of Analytical Observation

Photography and video are oriented toward the effect of presence. They fix external appearance, emotional state, intonation, and situational reaction. Even in highly documentary forms, they do not require logical continuity. Contradictions are easily compensated for by charisma, tempo of speech, visual confidence, or audience response.

Digital discourse is organized as a sequence of autonomous fragments oriented toward immediate emotional response and not presupposing continuation or return. Recognition, by contrast, requires linearity — not in the literary sense, but as the possibility of reconstructing a trajectory of thought over time. Where discourse is fragmented into autonomous affective units, such reconstruction becomes impossible. What remains visible is reaction, not cognition.

Return to previous statements is structurally difficult. Visual media do not embed repeated analytical examination as part of their communicative logic. They are therefore highly effective instruments of influence, but weak instruments of recognition. What they show is not how thought unfolds, but how presence is performed.

3. Written Discourse as a Medium of Fixation and Return

Written discourse operates in a fundamentally different cognitive mode. A text unfolds over time, is preserved, allows repeated reading, and enables comparison across multiple statements by the same author. These properties

make writing a medium in which the trajectory of thought becomes discernible, rather than merely its outcome.

Within written discourse, one can observe stable logical patterns, repeated conceptual moves, strategies of avoidance, and the author's relation to the limits of their own understanding. Crucially, this does not concern normative correctness. What matters is not whether a position is "right," but how thinking behaves when it encounters difficulty, contradiction, or uncertainty.

The methodological claim here is not that writing is culturally superior to visual presence, but that it enables a specific cognitive procedure: the recognition of personality through durable traces that allow return, comparison, and the observation of stability. This procedure becomes most visible when recognition occurs in the absence of self-presentation.

3.1. Non-Addressed Written Traces: A Classical Model of Recognition

A paradigmatic illustration of such recognition is found in *Eugene Onegin*. In the episode where Tatiana reads the books annotated by Onegin, recognition arises not from his speech, behavior, or declarations, but from the marginal traces left by his reading — marks made without intention to communicate or to be interpreted.

These traces are non-addressed. They do not express a position or manage an impression. They register moments of attention, agreement, or cognitive pause as a secondary residue of thinking. Tatiana's insight emerges precisely from this quality. She perceives by what thought and with what he silently agreed. What becomes visible is not an image of personality, but a pattern of mental movement.

Such traces allow return. They can be reread, compared across multiple

passages, and accumulated as evidence of stability rather than as a single situational performance. Personality is recognized not where the subject seeks to be seen, but where thought leaves a durable footprint capable of withstanding deceleration and repeated examination.

This episode captures the core epistemological claim of the present article: written discourse does not express the self — it exposes the trajectory and limits of cognition.

4. Error as an Epistemological Indicator

Once recognition is understood as the reconstruction of a trajectory rather than the reception of a declared image, error acquires diagnostic significance. Error does not indicate ignorance as such, but the boundary of conceptual mastery. Its epistemological value depends on the author's relation to it.

Return to a formulation, clarification of a term, or acknowledgment of uncertainty indicates autonomous thinking. Retreat into repetition, abstraction, or emotional pressure points to a reproductive mode of consciousness. It is therefore indicative that manipulative texts are nearly free of error. This absence does not reflect precision, but risk avoidance: such texts minimize specificity in order to avoid logical tension.

Error, by contrast, is always one's own. It cannot be borrowed, staged, or convincingly imitated over time.

5. Manipulative Texts and Intolerance of Deceleration

Deliberately manipulative texts are oriented toward reaction rather than understanding. Their effectiveness depends on speed of perception and the absence of pause. As a rule, they do not withstand repeated reading, avoid

precise definitions, replace argumentation with intonation and moral pressure, and do not permit return to initial premises.

In this respect, the observation of Gustave Le Bon remains relevant: mass influence operates most effectively where fixation and time for reflection are absent. Written discourse, by contrast, structurally introduces delay. It forces deceleration and thereby undermines manipulative effect.

6. Slow Writing and the Recognition of Personality: Historico-Publicistic Literature

Long before the emergence of digital media, the problem of recognition under conditions of mass visibility was articulated within historico-publicistic literature — a genre situated between empirical observation, social diagnosis, and analytical narration. Unlike purely literary or fictional writing, this tradition was oriented toward identifying stable patterns of perception, behavior, and collective illusion in societies undergoing rapid transformation.

The observations of Fanny Trollope, recorded in diary and essayistic form, function not as personal impressions but as publicistic diagnostics of American social behavior in conditions of democratization and mass visibility. Her texts allow the reader to trace not only emotional reactions, but also persistent biases, repetitions, and cognitive blind spots — that is, the structure of perception unfolding over time.

A similar methodological position characterizes Alexis de Tocqueville, whose analytical strength lay not in rhetorical persuasion or oratorical presence, but in slow writing, structural comparison, and the careful fixation of recurring social mechanisms. Tocqueville's work demonstrates how a stable analytical perspective becomes recognizable precisely through duration, return, and

internal consistency of thought.

A particularly instructive example of such recognition through written traces is provided by *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* by Elizabeth Gaskell. Gaskell repeatedly emphasizes the extreme reserve and social reticence of the Brontë sisters in their broader social relations, noting that their inner lives were largely inaccessible through direct observation. Under these conditions of opacity, Charlotte Brontë's intellectual and emotional structure is reconstructed primarily through her letters. Importantly, even where personal acquaintance and direct correspondence existed, letters functioned not as expressions of intimacy, but as durable traces allowing return, comparison, and reconstruction over time.

These letters function not as acts of self-presentation, but as durable cognitive traces. Through repetition, restraint of tone, returns to the same moral and conceptual concerns, and moments of hesitation, these written traces make discernible a stable inner orientation that was otherwise invisible in social interaction. Recognition here emerges not from presence or expressiveness, but from the linear accumulation of written material over time.

This biographical method anticipates the epistemological claim advanced in the present article: where visual or behavioral observation fails to reveal the structure of thought, writing provides access to personality precisely because it preserves duration, allows return, and exposes the limits within which cognition operates.

Within the same historico-publicistic lineage stands Gustave Le Bon, whose analysis of crowd psychology identifies the conditions under which visibility, emotional contagion, and speed of perception replace reflection and fixation. His key insight — that mass influence operates most effectively in the absence

of pause and critical return — directly anticipates the communicative logic of contemporary digital environments.

What unites these figures is not literary style, but a shared epistemological function: the use of slow, durable writing as a means of recognizing social and cognitive structures that remain invisible in regimes of immediacy.

7. Thought and Emotion: Different Levels of Understanding

Emotions, pauses, and intonations provide access to the subject's state at a given moment. They are not insignificant, but they do not allow for the identification of stable cognitive structures. Thought fixed in writing, by contrast, appears as a process that permits return, correction, and accumulation. Recognition of personality presupposes work with time. In this sense, written discourse offers a more precise analytical access than visual or oral communication, which remains bound to immediacy and situational effect.

Conclusion

In a culture of visual abundance, written discourse appears paradoxically marginalized. Yet it is precisely its slowness, durability, and intolerance toward simulation that make it the most reliable instrument for recognizing personality.

Photographs fix an image.

Manipulative texts fix a reaction.

Written discourse fixes the structure of thought and its limits.

One can understand who a person wants to appear to be.

One can understand which emotions they transmit.

One can understand which group or identity they align with.

But to understand a person as a thinking subject requires something else: texts,

duration, repetition, error, and return to words.

For this reason, the disappearance of extended writing from everyday culture is not a minor cultural shift, but an epistemological catastrophe. We see more people than ever — and understand fewer than ever before.

In digital environments, visual self-presentation does not amplify real qualities; it compensates for their absence. The greater the gap between lived experience and self-image, the more intensive the production of images becomes.

Photography freezes time, removes context, eliminates feedback, and turns personality into an assertion without a procedure of verification.

Illiterate or unstable writing accompanied by demonstratively assertive imagery forms a stable and recognizable type of public self-presentation. Its defining feature is the asymmetry between visual declarations of strength and linguistic inability to sustain meaning. Where an image claims autonomy and coherence, language reveals fragmentation, impulsivity, and the absence of internal regulation.

Photography may deceive. Quotation may be borrowed or fabricated.

Error, however, is always one's own.

This is why written discourse remains one of the most reliable criteria for the real content of personality in digital culture. It does not fix who a person wants to appear to be, but who they are capable of being over time — without pose, without frame, and without a camera.

Social networks provide maximum visibility with minimal recognizability.